



Shenandoah Mennonite Historian

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Major New Book on Civil War

Volume 1 of Unionists and the Civil War Experience in the Shenandoah Valley has been published by the Valley Brethren-Mennonite Heritage Center. Now we have much more detail about how Mennonites and Church of the Brethren responded when the frightful destruction of war threatened and came to the Valley, particularly under General Sheridan in 1864.

As local expert, John Heatwole, stated on the book jacket, "If we exclude this story we run the risk of glorifying the war as a stage set with banners flying, bands playing, and troops moving grandly over a sterile landscape."

Cal Redekop calls this book a "major event for professionals and lay people alike, because it presents primary vivid accounts of the conflict between persons, families, neighborhoods and the military forces"

Most certainly, it is all the above and more. Here are details from Southern Claims Commission Records, 1871-1880 from the National Archives, researched by David S. Rodes and Norman R. Wenger. Emmert F. Bittinger serves as editor and provides helpful overview comments.

More volumes are being planned. This one covers the Mt. Crawford and Cross Keys areas of Rockingham County. Here are primary vivid accounts of how the war brought miscarriage of justice, property loss and most of all, **struggles of conscience.** What were people to do when war

came right to their doorstep and they lost livestock, barns, outbuildings, mills and in some cases even their houses?

The book gives details of the claims made to the Federal government by people after the Civil War, who applied for losses experienced during the war. The government required thorough and detailed information of the losses, including the testimony of relatives and neighbors. Very specific details of the losses and the exact testimony relating to those losses were required in order to have a case approved for reimbursement.

Sometimes they included a claim that they were involved in what is called an "Underground Railroad." However, this is not the "railroad" that took slaves to the north—this was a so-called "underground railroad" that helped men of conscience, either by hiding them, and/or helping them go North to escape being pressed into the military.

We cite some illustrations of the specific details on pages 2 and 5. Thus we understand better that many, though not all—(1) favored the Union cause and were against the "rebellion" of the Confederate cause, and (2) that it was a struggle of conscience for some because of what the neighbors would think or say. Many detailed questions were asked.

This sampling from a few Mennonite claims should suffice to illustrate how significant this material is for understanding the Civil War. Appropriately, many Civil War "buffs" can now see more than the movement of troops and campaigns and battles.

Abraham D. & Magdalenah (Rodes) Heatwole

They owned a 96-acre farm on the west side of Pleasant Run in Pleasant Valley about five miles from Harrisonburg, and claimed a loss of \$996.75. Facing starvation and poverty when General Sheridan's troops were in the area, they decided to accompany Sheridan's army with the refugee train of 400 wagons and headed North. From Martinsburg, they headed for Ohio returning after the war.

Heatwole was 46 when he was interrogated. He said his sympathies "were altogether on the side of the union from beginning to end. I never had any use for the Confederacy. All my family, my father [Dr. Gabriel Heatwole] and all my brothers [David, John, Joseph, Jacob, Peter, and Simeon] were strong union people"

"We were all threatened." My father was arrested and imprisoned at Harrisonburg "for entertaining union sentiments." Five of my brothers and three brothers-in-law were in the group of 70 trying to flee North, but who were captured and sent to Richmond, where they were threatened "with all kinds of punishment such as shooting and hanging unless the volunteered in the rebel army."

Abraham himself was threatened several times with arrest and punishment, but he "finally got clear" when he agreed to haul a load of provisions to Monterey. When the war broke out he refused to go to the army and Magdalenah's father, John Rodes, hired a man to go in Abraham's place, but he only served two weeks, then went home again. Thereupon, the officials came after Abraham again. That's when he agreed to take a team and haul a load to Monterey. He returned home ill. When the \$500 exemption privilege became available, he paid that to be excused from service.

Abraham did admit that he voted at Harrisonburg for secession under pressure [on May 23, 1861]. His wife testified that he felt so terrible when he got home he was "greatly depressed" and that he "felt so bad about it, it made him nearly sick." When she questioned him he said he "had done the worst thing he had done in his life." But he was afraid to go home without voting for secession.

During the war Abraham and Magdalenah both testified that they "kept a great many refugees" and helped them escape. They had a secret place for that. "My house was a sort of rendezvous for refugees and deserters from the rebel army," said Abraham. Magdalenah said they "were in constant danger from having so many come to our place for concealment . . ." Abraham, though in "great danger," got them passed safely through the mountains to Union lines.

A number of relatives and neighbors were examined and cross-examined regarding Abraham's loyalties. One, who served in the Confederate army, testified to Abraham's Union loyalties and also confirmed that there was intimidation on voting day at the Harrisonburg polling place. Three men resisted the pressure and voted against secession at that voting place.

Heatwole's claim was denied because he had voted for secession! (pages 161-86)

John Evers Claim:

He was a Mennonite minister who lived near Port Republic. He put in a claim for four horses worth \$575. Being a minister he did not need to worry about military service. He says he did not vote for secession (although his father did). He was "conscientiously opposed to taking part generally in political contests," but he advised "my friends not to vote secesh." He further said, "If I couldn't vote Union I determined not to vote at all."

Two neighbors witnessed that he was regarded as loyal to the Union, but they knew of no incidents of his being molested, or that he in any way supported the Confederacy. A sister and daughter confirmed that property was taken. However, a confidential witness, Samuel Ruebush claimed he never talked to John about the war and that he never knew of his doing anything for the Union.

Government officials realized that he did not vote and they concluded that he did nothing for the Union cause and supported nothing, so they disallowed his claim. (p. 465-76).

Joseph Beery (1809-74) of Cross Keys

A Mennonite, Beery claimed losses of \$600, and was allowed \$460. He furnished substitutes for two sons, then later tried to persuade one substitute to desert to the Union army. The substitute then reported him and Joseph was arrested and sat in the Harrisonburg jail, along with Gabriel Heatwole and Brethren Elder John Kline. Being an "old man" he didn't want to die in jail, so he took the oath of allegiance to the Confederacy. In 1863 he was arrested again for helping someone go North, then he sat in the local jail until taken to Castle Thunder in Richmond for four weeks.

He was one of two in his precinct who voted against the Confederacy. One time he fled "the rebels" who came to his farm to shoot him. Since they didn't find him, they shot his hogs and chickens. For a while he went to Ohio to take a horse to his son there. After thinking it over, he returned. "If I had to die it should be with my wife and daughters."

Among other witnesses interrogated, Samuel Ruebush (who testified against minister John Evers above), clearly testified that Beery "was very free with me to express his sentiments" and that he was "always a Union man." One son, Solomon, a member of the Mennonite Church, was drafted later in the war and paid the \$500 exemption fee to stay out of service. Solomon also filed a claim for \$325, but was allowed only \$100.

Witness Samuel Ruebush, when he saw Beery return from the Richmond jail, thought Beery "seemed very much broken; but still talked Union."

He was treated badly by fellowmen and in 1874, he was found hanged, "his death said to have been an act of "self destruction." (pages 365-80)

Civil War Poems by Michael Shank

Men of conscience who did not feel they could go to war and fight had few choices during the Civil War. Early in the war quite a number were forced into service, unless they found a hiding place or went North.

Some who were placed in service against their will, either refused to shoot at other people, or they gave in and did behind the scenes work like hauling with wagons and horses.

After some months in service quite a few were allowed to return home for a furlough. Quite a few did not return to camp, i.e. they went AWOL. Then it meant go into hiding or go North.

Michael Shank (1829-1905), who later became a Mennonite deacon, was one of those sent to camp at Fort Colliers, near Winchester. From that location he wrote a poem to his family on November 13, 1861. Later, in 1862, we find him in prison. From there he wrote another poem.

It appears that he sometimes learned first-hand what war was like, because he was "called upon to leave his bed" and sometimes he was called to go where "cannons roar and bullets flow." He is not specific what his duties were, but he obviously learned first-hand what war was like.

With a tender heart he made it clear that he was a man of conscience who missed his family and church community and who tried to stay close to the Lord. He obviously did not want to be in military service.

To My Family

Dear wife and children, one and all;
To you I speak, both great and small;
Though in your midst I can't appear
My heart and mind are ever near.

For you I often weep and sigh
For you my prayers ascend on high,
And oft I fondly call to mind
Those dear, dear ones I left behind.

I know you have many cares
In tending to your own affairs
And oft you know not what to do
Because so much devolves on you.

For oft before your work is done
Your children all come one by one,
A thousand things they wish to know
And follow on where e'er you go.

And if by chance from toil and grief,
You seat yourself to find relief
Then comes a little pit-a-pat
Oh! mother this, Oh! mother that.

And thus your sorrow, grief and trouble
Goes on and ever seems to double,
Almost you sink beneath despair
Because I can't your trouble share.

And while your troubles are not few
I oft have some troubles too,
For often at midnight I roam
When you are all asleep at home.

And when I'm called upon to go
Where cannons roar and bullets flow,
Oh! then my mind runs back to you
And seems to say, "What will you do?"

Oh! may the rulers of our land
Obey Jehovah's great command
And love their foes as well as friends
Then wars will cease and strife will end.

And men then seek the Lord to know
Who peace and pardon will bestow,
Then I'll return and with you dwell
And no more bid the sad farewell.

*See next page for the poem he wrote in
1862, while in prison.*

We'll All Go Home

Prisoners we are closely confined,
But this not one of us should mind,
For Christ hath told us, in his word,
That we should ever obey our Lord.

Chorus: We'll sure go home as soon as freed
A holy life with God to lead;
Go home, go home, and that indeed
As soon as God the way will speed.

We know it is God's holy will
Our fellow men we should not kill,
But we should lead a Christian life,
And not spend all our days in strife.

The Lord hath said we all can see,
Persecution we should flee,
And this we surely had in view,
A safer place we did pursue.

But we were captured on our way,
And here as prisoners now we stay,
Absent from home and from our friends,
With no one near who pity lends.

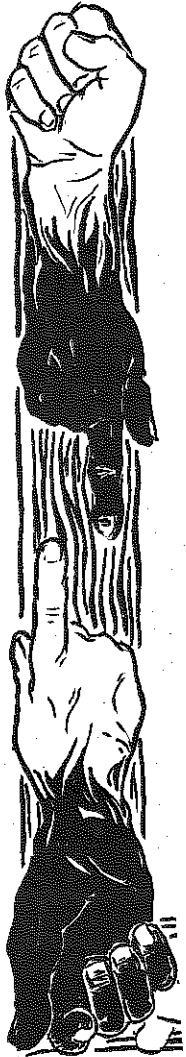
Dear Brethren all, both far and near;
Be with us all engaged in prayer,
That we from prison may be free,
And serve our God wherever we be.

Although the world may at us look,
As though we too much undertook,
To leave our dearest friends behind,
And seek a safer place to find.

But this we did for conscience sake,
We did not wish God's law to break,
For those, who will the Savior grieve,
Damnation surely will receive.

But there is One who reigns on high,
That always will to us be nigh,
And if we put our trust in Him,
He will from prison us redeem.

Then let us all the Lord obey,
That from truth we never stray,
So that we may all stand the test
And when we die, go home to rest.



John Rhodes [Rodes] Claim

It is difficult to imagine the tremendous pressures that had rather suddenly built up for Virginia to join the Confederate States. The Valley became something of a dividing line between plantation people to the East and the more mountainous dwellers to the West.

It also became a major route for troop movement. And on top of that it was one of the finest "breadbaskets" the Confederacy had to feed its army. When the constitutional convention was held to thrash out the question of whether to join the Confederacy, the local representatives strongly leaned toward keeping the Union together, rather than to have Civil War. The local papers decried the awfulness of what the war would bring.

However, when the war began in the spring of 1861, all of that changed dramatically. Seldom has one seen newspapers such as the local Harrisonburg paper do such a major about-face as happened by May 23, the date set for the vote on secession. By that time the pressure for joining the Confederacy was so powerful, that it became dangerous to vote against secession. Polarization on the question of war pulled families, neighbors, and communities apart.

Voting was a very open process and what happened at the Mt. Crawford polling place has become well-known. The John Rodes claim gives some details. It is one of the dramatic stories of this significant book.

Ed.

John Rodes was married to Fannie Bowman at the Greenmount Church. He was Mennonite and she "Dunker" (Church of the Brethren). They lived near Pleasant Valley. Both agreed that they were against slavery, secession and war. John died on May 31, 1870, before a claim was filed. He left a widow and seven children, Son David E. Rodes, administrator of the estate, then filed a claim for \$1256.25 for horses, oats, corn, cattle, hogs, sheep, potatoes molasses and salt. He lived on the John Rodes farm and was 38 years old.

David and his father had both voted for the union delegates that went to the 71st Richmond Convention to debate secession.

Both also voted for secession in May because "we were afraid not to vote it." They had wanted to vote for the Union, but before the secession vote, Union men were "everywhere threatened with violence of some kind" if they failed to vote for secession. They were told to either leave the state "or take the chance of being hung or shot" if they voted against secession.

On that fateful day a company of armed men were stationed at Mt. Crawford, who were going to make sure that the Mt. Crawford vote was unanimous for secession. In fact, one man named Harrison dared to vote against it. They then went after him and brought him back and made him change his vote.

When Father John sent his sixteen-year-old son over the mountains to escape war, the father got grief for it. His wife, Fannie, witnessed that both of them were for the Union. She testified that they had harbored other refugees and helped them escape. If they had anything to sell, they would let the poor have it rather than selling it to the confederates. "We were all Mennonites," said Fannie, and never had any sympathy with slavery. She did admit that she had a brother in the union army as well as some nephews.

When son John came back from the North, the "Secesh" took after him and chased him into the house. "saying they would blow his G_d D_mn brains out. They said we were lower than niggers." At a church meeting they attended, some rebels present harassed them bitterly "They said we were between niggers and the dogs."

One son, however, Frederick by name, voted for Jeff Davis. David says he gave his brother "fits about it," but he was "one out and out Secesh all the way."

Daughter Sarah was married to Peter J. Shoemaker, a Mennonite minister, who witnessed that the entire family [except Frederick] were Union sympathizers as everyone around them knew. Government allowed them \$476.57 for their losses. (pages 281-308)

Unionists and the Civil War Experience

We look forward to the publication of more volumes that will give us further details about experiences as described in these claims to the Southern Claims Commission.

The Valley Brethren-Mennonite Heritage Center is to be complimented for publishing this kind of documentation.

It is obvious that many Mennonites and Church of the Brethren were against secession and war. Of course, there were exceptions. We know that in Augusta County, Bishop Jacob Hildebrand voted for secession (most likely under pressure), but the journal kept by his first cousin, Jacob R. Hildebrand, makes it very clear that Jacob R., who was a Mennonite church trustee and who became a minister during the war, was quite pro-Confederate.

His journals, which are located in the Virginia Mennonite Conference archives at EMU, have been published. Eventually, we'll know more about both sides.

Ed.

Historical Celebrations

On Thanksgiving weekend the Park View Mennonite Church published a fine history written by Harold D. Lehman. It is marked by thorough research and is well written. Several rarities mark the book.

Fifty-year histories seldom appear in a quality this fine. And rarely is a congregational history written by a person who has personally experienced the whole time span of the book. Nor do many congregational histories contain excellent quality color photos such as this one.

Copies may be ordered from Park View Mennonite Church, 1600 College Avenue, Harrisonburg, VA 22802-5541. Cost: \$25.00, plus \$2.50 shipping and handling.

Mt. Vernon Mennonite to Celebrate 50th

Mt. Vernon Mennonite Church of near Grottoes, VA will celebrate 50 years since its beginning in 1954. Saturday night and Sunday, May 15 and 16 are dates for their Anniversary/Homecoming.

Saturday night begins with a carry-in supper at 5:30, with a program following at 7:00 p.m. A skit of how Harold Eshleman, pastor of Chicago Avenue Mennonite Church, discovered Mt. Vernon as a possible site for a church plant, will start the evening program. Singing and memories from former attenders will follow.

Sunday morning services begin at 9:30 with worship time and a message by Tim Martin, a former assistant pastor. Following will be an open mike for former pastors and former attenders to share significant memories. A noon meal will follow, with afternoon time for further fellowship.

Hubert Pellman was the first pastor. He served for 18 years. Eugene Souder pastored for more than 20 years. Currently, Al and Rose Huyard are pastors.

A 32-page booklet of 200 pictures and history is being printed and will be available at the time of the anniversary/homecoming celebration. To reserve a free copy, call 540-249-4368.

Eugene Souder

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